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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
26 March 1963

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Dissidence Among Soviet Intellectuals

1. In the freer atmosphere which has prevailed in the Soviet Union since Stalin's death, intellectuals have become increasingly bold about defying or simply ignoring the party's cultural policy and official pressures. Through its control of publications and writers' organizations, the regime is still able to silence dissident writers--although even this requires a prolonged battle--but it has been unable to reproduce the monolithic facade of cheerful unanimity which characterized the cultural scene under Stalin.

2. The party's latest campaign to bring dissident intellectuals into line was triggered by Khrushchev's furious reaction to abstract paintings shown him at an art exhibit on 1 December. In its initial phase--from December until March--the crack-down consisted mainly of a massive press campaign against abstractionism and "modernistic" trends in general, although some concrete measures were also taken. For example, the central committee section on culture, which exercises a censorship and control function, remains active despite earlier indications that it would be abolished, and the editor of the "liberal" Literaturnaya Gazeta was replaced by a "hard-liner," thus depriving the liberal writers of one of their principal vehicles of expression.

3. In general, however, the party seemed during this period to be trying to accomplish its goals by persuasion so as to alienate the intellectuals as little as possible. The intellectuals were not to be easily persuaded, however, and the party called two meetings--one on 17 December between top party leaders and intellectuals, and one on 24-26 December between the central committee ideological Commission and the younger generation of writers and

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artists. At both meetings, ideological secretary Ilichev reaffirmed in no uncertain terms the party's intention to control cultural developments and its decision to enforce "socialist realism." At the same time, however, he offered forgiveness for penitents and tempered his criticism of individuals with praise for their talents, implying that their mistakes were of a temporary and easily rectifiable nature. In addition he took great pains to calm the fears voiced by some intellectuals that the party's campaign against modernism represented a return to the "method of the cult." Both meetings were remarkable for the unusual atmosphere of free discussion, and dissenting intellectuals were allowed to defend their points of view openly. The hard-line writers and cultural bureaucrats were openly pressing for a purge of the creative unions--many of which had recently come to be dominated by the liberal faction--and for a return to stringent controls over culture, but the party at this point seemed reluctant to back them all the way.

4. The intellectuals, however, failed to respond to the party's treatment and put up an unprecedented show of resistance to attempts to crack down. The atmosphere of ferment which had been so noticeable in October and November continued, although it was no longer openly reflected in the press, and the abstract artists once again retired underground. Several prominent intellectuals publicly protested the party's policy and argued that divergent trends in the arts should be allowed to exist. Not a single liberal intellectual of note joined in the anti-modernist hue and cry, and many seemed determined to behave exactly as though nothing had happened.

5. Whether because of the intellectuals' resistance or for other reasons, as of mid-January the campaign seemed to be letting up, and it was unclear what the party's next step would be. The publication in Pravda of a "pseudo-recantation" by one of the artists who had infuriated Khrushchev, in which he criticized abstractionism but defended the "searchings" of the abstractionists as an inevitable and necessary reaction against the stale art of the Stalin era, gave some hope that the party would be satisfied with lip-service to its official policy.

6. Judging from the tenor of Khrushchev's speech to the intellectuals on 8 March, however, it seems that the party was gradually coming to realize--with some alarm--the full extent of the ferment among Soviet intellectuals, of which "modernism" was only one manifestation. Khrushchev was clearly dismayed at how widely the views of the intellectuals (particularly the younger ones) and the party diverged on a number of subjects, including the Stalin era and de-Stalinization, the right of the party to control the arts, and most important, the goals and nature of the future Communist society. This was clearly reflected in his statement that "those who preach ideas of peaceful coexistence in ideology are sliding down objectively to the positions of anti-Communism." Laying down an uncompromisingly hard line, Khrushchev warned that deviations from socialist realism would not be tolerated and that the party would give no quarter in enforcing its policy.

7. Although Khrushchev did not state explicitly how far the party was prepared to go in enforcing its policy, the March meeting has obviously ushered in a more rigorous phase of the crackdown. Extensive personnel and possibly organizational changes seem likely; Khrushchev's criticism of some of the most prominent "liberals" and his praise for a notorious hard-liner suggest that the party now is prepared to rely heavily on the conservatives and party hacks to ensure ideological conformity. A hard-liner has already been appointed head of the Moscow writers' organization--a hotbed of liberals--and one may replace the chief editor of Novy Mir, a move which would deprive the liberals of their last major vehicle of expression. Authors whose works are the least bit controversial will probably find it increasingly difficult to publish. Extensive pressure will probably be brought privately to bear on the dissidents to recant; none of the "big names" has done so yet, but some of them have broken their silence with bland statements of support, which suggests that pressure has already been applied. A new weapon to which the regime may resort on a limited basis is the commitment of dissident writers to mental institutions: four such writers were declared emotionally unstable last fall, before the crackdown,

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and Khrushchev, warning that the straitjacket exists for madmen, made it clear that he considers abstract art the product of unbalanced minds. The mental institution would be a useful weapon only if applied on a selective basis, however.

8. Despite the variety of weapons at its disposal, the regime will probably not obtain the desired results. The last attempt to crack down occurred in 1957, in the wake of the Polish and Hungarian events; after a year and a half of threats, pressures, cajolements and administrative measures, the regime had failed to obtain even half-hearted recantations from some of the dissidents. Six years later, the regime's prospects for obtaining the desired intellectual conformity are even dimmer. A slow but steady process of liberalization since 1959, when the party adopted a hands-off policy toward the writers, was greatly intensified in October 1961, after the renewal of de-Stalinization at the 22nd party congress and again by Khrushchev's approval of the publication of several anti-Stalin novels in October.

9. The present intellectual ferment is far more deep-rooted than it was in 1956 and has spread this time to music and art. The young intellectuals who are at the forefront of the present ferment are more militant, more impatient for change, less cautious, and less willing to tolerate the party's interference than the older writers who dominated the literary revolt in 1956. Moreover, a large section of Soviet youth regard the angry young poets such as Yevtushenko and Voznesensky as the spokesmen for their generation and are quick to take their side against the party. As a result of the continued liberalization and increased contacts with the West, the climate of Soviet public opinion in general has undergone a change and the modernistic work currently under attack has gained a certain amount of acceptance. Among its patrons are Adzhubey, Furtseva, Mikoyan's children, and the nuclear scientists at Dubna.

10. This process of ideological erosion makes the problem of handling dissident intellectuals an increasingly difficult one for the regime. It was clear after 1957 that the party would not revert to the use of terror, but without it the regime possesses

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no really effective method of enforcing ideological conformity, or even the semblance thereof. The prominent intellectuals who are the most outspoken are the least susceptible to pressure. Moreover, after successive freezes and thaws, the writers and artists themselves have become increasingly unwilling to believe that the party's crackdown is permanent; they remain silent until the storm blows over and then emerge for another round.

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